

Early trade and traders in St. Paul /

EARLY TRADE AND TRADERS IN ST. PAUL.* BY CHARLES D. ELFELT.

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In 1840, Bishop Loras of Prairie du Chien, being desirous of developing the truths of Christianity, sent the Rev. Lucian Galtier as a missionary to St. Peter and Fort Snelling, situated on opposite sides of the mouth of the St. Peter river, then so called. He found a number of Catholic families located at a point about six miles below the fort, some of whom had been driven off the Military Reserve, which extended then, according to military authority, down to what is now known as the "Seven Corners." He at once called the good people together and in a very short time a log chapel was erected and dedicated to their patron, Saint Paul, and hence the name was given to the settlement, and from that day attention was drawn to its locality. Subsequently, when the territorial organization took place, the name was permanently adopted.

These good people were principally old French voyageurs; some of them had been in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company; and others of them were employed by the American Fur Company, and by the sutler at Fort Snelling, who did more or less trading with the Indians. Whatever they required had to be obtained either from the American Fur Company's store at St. Peter, now known as Mendota, or from the sutler at Fort Snelling, there being no store in their midst, unless you would so call a few barrels of whisky and sundry parcels of shot, powder, and tobacco, laid away in Peter Parrant's cellar and in some of the other settlers' cellars for the purpose of trading for a few furs from the Indians.

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Parrant located at this point about the year 1838, and has been reported by some of our historians as a very bad character, a bad man; but Mr. Larpenteur says: "I take issue

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with them on that point, as I knew him well; he was no worse than any of the pioneers at that time, and if his only crime was selling whisky to the Indians, they all did it; and the American Fur Company, under another name, sold ten barrels where the other poor fellows sold one.”

In the fall of 1842, Henry Jackson, a young merchant from Galena, was attracted to this point and came up here with a general stock of goods. He erected a log cabin, which served as both a dwelling and a store, on what is now the corner of Jackson and Bench streets, having bought of Benjamin Jarvis about two acres of his claim; and there he and his wife spent the winter, beginning what may be called the first commercial enterprise in the place. The following spring, in 1843, William Hartshorn of St. Louis made a trip up the Mississippi river for the purpose of buying furs. The boat landed at St. Paul, and Mr. Jackson came on board and took passage up to Fort Snelling. On the boat Jackson made the acquaintance of Mr. Hartshorn, to whom he sold his winter collection of furs, At the same time the two entered into a co-partnership that was the beginning of the firm of Jackson & Hartshorn, which firm existed until its dissolution in 1847.

J. W. Simpson opened a store here in the spring of 1843, which was no doubt the second in St. Paul. John R. Irvine, together with Mr. Alexander Megé, a Frenchman, also opened a store in 1843, with a general assortment of goods. Their place of business was near the site of the Minnesota Soap Company's plant on Eagle street.

Capt. Louis Robert came up from Prairie du Chien in the spring of 1844 and bought the old cabin occupied by Peter Parrant in 1839 on the river bank at the foot of the cooley, a point which is now the corner of Jackson street and the levee.

This year, 1844, Mr. Daniel Hopkins moved his stock of goods up from Red Rock, having had a trading post there for a year or two before. He bought a piece of ground from Henry Jackson, on the corner of Third and Jackson streets, and upon 165 it built a commendable frame store, which was probably the first one of the kind built in St. Paul. The Fire &

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Marine Insurance Building now occupies the greater part of the spot on Which the Hopkins store stood.

The following year, 1845, Dr. John J. Dewey opened the first drug store, just below Louis Robert's store, and in the same building Charles Cavalier carried on the harness business. Later on, in 1848, Cavalier sold out his harness business and entered into partnership with Dewey, forming the firm of Dewey & Cavalier, druggists.

In 1847 the firm of Hartshorn & Jackson dissolved, Jackson retaining the old original stand. Hartshorn moved further up town and occupied a building formerly built by Sergeant Mortimer. Its location was on the spot now occupied by the City Central Police Station, on Third street, near Hill street. There he carried on his business of general merchandising and Indian trading until the spring of 1848, when he sold out and was succeeded by the firm of Freeman, Larpenteur & Co., who removed the stock down town into their new store, on the corner of the levee and Jackson street. This firm was succeeded by John Randall & Co., in the fall of 1849.

A. L. Larpenteur, after the dissolution of Freeman, Larpenteur & Co., opened his store on the corner of Third and Jackson streets in the spring of 1850. About the same time, a young man came to St. Paul with letters of introduction to Gov. Ramsey and others. He engaged himself as a clerk to Mr. Larpenteur, became a member of his family, and remained with him until November, when, becoming homesick, he left St. Paul on the last boat and returned to his home in Philadelphia. That young man was Mr. William H. Rhawn, who subsequently became the president of the St. Paul & Duluth Railroad Company, and is now president of the National Bank of the Republic, Philadelphia.

In 1837 the American Fur Company had a trading post at St. Peter in charge of Henry H. Sibley. William H. Forbes clerked for Sibley until 1847, when the Fur Company established a branch store in St. Paul, which was known as the St. Paul Outfit, and Forbes was placed in charge.

In 1848 Nathan Myrick came here from La Crosse, and engaged in general merchandising. The same year A. R. French, a discharged soldier from Fort Snelling, engaged in the saddlery business, and the Pioneer in its business notices subsequently called him the "Harness Mantua-maker."

In June, 1849, Levi Sloan opened quite a large stock of groceries and liquors on the upper part of Third street opposite to the American House; Hugh McCann sat upon the bench as a cobbler; Henry W. and Charles H. Tracy opened on the lower part of Third street a general stock of merchandise; and the McCloud Brothers on Bench street, near Minnesota street, opened the first exclusive stock of general hardware in St. Paul.

In October, 1849, Pierre Chouteau, Henry H. Sibley, Henry M. Rice, and Sylvanus B. Lowery, previously trading under the name of the Sioux, Winnebago & Chippeway Outfit, dissolved partnership. Henry M. Rice became their successor, and removed the business and stock to Watab, on the east side of the Mississippi river a few miles above Sauk Rapids.

The following month the Elfelt Brothers occupied the building that had been vacated by the Outfit Company, with a general stock of dry goods, clothing, etc. The building was located on Eagle street at the corner of Spring street, near the upper levee.

Bartlett Presley started the same autumn with a small stock of pipes, tobacco, and confectionery. He occupied a log cabin on Robert street, near Third street. He built a small stand outside, upon which he displayed his wares, and from this humble beginning he built up a large and flourishing trade.

This enumeration comprises nearly all the business enterprises of our city up to January 1st, 1850. During that year, as in 1849, which saw the organization of Minnesota as a

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Territory, a great immigration to Minnesota and to St. Paul took place. Thenceforward the number of traders and lines of business rapidly increased.